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SUBJECT: THE ROAD TO BENGUELA

REF: LUANDA 1015

¶1. (U) Summary. The road connecting Luanda with Benguela-Lobito, a priority infrastructure project for the GRA, appears near completion, but the road has not been rebuilt, only resurfaced. End Summary.

New-Old Road

¶2. (U) Most of the two-lane coastal highway from Luanda to Benguela has been resurfaced, Econoff observed on late September road trips between Luanda and Benguela. However, the work appears limited to resurfacing the existing road and leaving the road bed as 30 years of neglect have left it. Work has proceeded in sections, so the road repeatedly changed back and forth from new to old pavement. Econoff and visiting analysts observed work in progress on Sunday, September 23 along three sections of road. The road crews had neither graders to prepare the road bed nor rollers to smooth the final surface: this appeared to be only resurfacing work.

¶3. (U) New bridges under construction were a welcome exception to the usual standard for construction along this highway. Several war-shattered spans lay in their stream beds, and had been replaced years ago by narrow steel spans. Completely new roadbeds straightening out the existing sharp curves distinguish these wide new concrete bridges. (Note: Along the main road, a smooth surface over uneven pavement plus sharp curves made the ride more exciting than comfortable. End note.)

Hope for Durability

¶4. (U) An Embassy maintenance supervisor with African road-building experience said that the African standard calls for a 20-centimeter final layer of asphalt, but the Angolan resurfacing work he has observed is closer to 8 cm. thick. In hot weather, traffic will further thin the asphalt. The director of operations for the 20th Railway Brigade also criticized the quality of the road work, volunteered to Econoff that the quality is far below Chinese standards.

Buy American

¶5. (U) Road building equipment bore the logo of the China International Foundation (CIF), the prime contractor with the National Reconstruction Office (GRN) for infrastructure projects financed through the lines of credit. Some also bore the Caterpillar brand. The local Caterpillar dealer explained that the company building the Benguela road brought its Caterpillar equipment with it from China, but he has sold

new earth moving equipment to other Chinese companies in Angola. In addition, he said that most of the Chinese construction companies here buy their electrical generators from Caterpillar in Angola.

Comment

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16. (U) The viability of the port of Lobito as an alternative to the over crowded Port of Luanda depends, to a great extent, on the quality of the road linkage between Lobito and Angola's capital city. The older roads will eventually have to be replaced by a more modern highway that can more effectively handle heavy cargo and increase traffic flows before the Lobito Port can realize its full potential.  
FERNANDEZ